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THE SOVIET PROPOSAL FOR AN "ATOM-FREE ZONE" IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Abstract

The Soviet Union since early 1956 has put forward various proposals for the exclusion of nuclear weapons from German territory as well as from an area extending beyond Germany. These proposals have usually been an integral part of broader Soviet schemes for a "European "zone of limitation and inspection of armaments." Since the spring of 1957, they have appeared with increasing prominence in official Soviet bloc statements and propaganda.

Currently, the creation of an "atom-free" zone in the two parts of Germany, plus Poland and Czechoslovakia, is a key element in the Soviet position and is being put forward as an independent step to be taken without other kinds of "demilitarization." While Moscow may not expect this scheme to be accepted by the West, it undoubtedly hopes that, in combination with the more threatening phases of its campaign against a nuclear weapons build-up in Western Europe, the proposal will delay the implementation of Western plans and raise pressures for another try at a settlement with the USSR.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Emergence of Current Proposal

Moscow has traditionally been sensitive to, and has long agitated against, the presence of US strategic nuclear striking power near the Soviet periphery. Reported US plans to deploy tactical nuclear weapons abroad gave a new focus to Soviet diplomatic and propaganda pressure beginning in January 1957. The Soviet campaign gained impetus during the

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spring when the possibility of a NATO nuclear weapons stockpile, and perhaps indigenous nuclear weapons production on the European continent, began to emerge.

The Soviet leaders undoubtedly believe that the equipping of NATO forces with nuclear-capable weapons and the concomitant establishment of nuclear weapons stockpiles in Europe would constitute a significant increase in the military strength of the West on the continent of Europe. They may also feel that the exclusion of nuclear weapons from the area in question will reduce the risks that new disorders in Eastern Europe could develop into military clashes between East and West in which nuclear weapons might be used. Moscow might additionally feel a degree of concern over the possible emergence of independent fourth or fifth country nuclear weapons capabilities on the European continent. At this juncture, however, Soviet concern over this aspect of the problem appears less apparent than over a US-UK sponsored nuclear weapons build-up in Europe.

The initial Soviet response to the emerging of Western plans was a typical blunt campaign warning of the dangerous consequences if the West proceeded. In its efforts, Moscow was spurred on by, and sought to take advantage of, a segment of public opinion in Western Europe which viewed the large-scale introduction of nuclear weapons into the area with skepticism and anxiety. The USSR warned with growing sharpness and frequency that areas in which nuclear weapons were located would suffer destruction from Soviet retaliatory nuclear blows in the event of war. In the spring of 1957 Moscow began to hint that Soviet nuclear weapons would be made available to the Eastern European satellites unless the West desisted.

Endeavoring to give its campaign a constructive element, the USSR, with Poland as the ostensible initiator, put forward a scheme involving, on the face of it, a concession by the Soviet bloc in return for the exclusion of Western nuclear weapons from the German Federal Republic. This concession was the commitment to exclude nuclear weapons not only from East Germany (which the USSR and East Germany had been proposing since 1956) but also from Poland and Czechoslovakia.

From the Soviet point of view, the launching of such a proposal for an "atom-free" zone has much to recommend it. It has the appeal of a seemingly simple measure by which a start could be made both toward the solution of the disarmament problem in general and of the European security problem in particular. It is responsive to certain segments of opinion in the West, giving encouragement to those who believe that another attempt at a resettlement with the USSR should be made before Western plans are implemented. At the same time, it provides a backdrop for possible Soviet plans to introduce nuclear weapons into the Warsaw Pact area.

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B. Some Implications of Proposal

Although the scheme as it now stands has many attractions from the Soviet point of view, Moscow can hardly have advanced it in the expectation that the West would accept. In its present form, at least, the Polish-Soviet proposal presents several difficulties, the following of which may be noted:

(1) Exclusion of "nuclear weapons," insofar as it relates to stockpiles of warheads, would be difficult to enforce. Even if Moscow -- and East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia -- were to concede the introduction of some inspectors into the bloc territory involved (neither Moscow nor Warsaw has said anything specific on this subject), detection of clandestine nuclear stockpiles, especially if they were established prior to the agreement, or of secret shipments of some categories of nuclear weapons into the area would still be difficult to assure. Moscow would thus not be wholly precluded from maintaining a certain clandestine nuclear capability in the area with relatively small risk of getting caught. On the other hand, it would probably calculate that Western governmental processes and public pressure would make Western violation unlikely.

It might be noted incidentally that, apart from being extremely vague regarding controls for its proposal, Moscow has lately asserted that even large-scale inspection can never be fully effective in the face of deliberate efforts to evade a disarmament agreement and should in any case await establishment of greater confidence among nations. Yet Moscow has advanced its "atom-free" zone scheme, which would require complex and highly mobile controls to provide even reasonable assurance of compliance, precisely as a step to create confidence.

(2) The Soviet proposal is vague on exactly what categories of weapons are to be affected. As the proposal now stands, it does not specify whether all weapons capable of firing nuclear shells and all delivery vehicles that can be fitted with nuclear warheads are to be banned or whether only nuclear shells, bombs, missile warheads, etc. themselves are to be affected. The East Germans have explicitly called for the exclusion of "rockets" from German territory, and Moscow itself in its general disarmament proposals has been somewhat more specific by referring to the prohibition of "atomic and hydrogen bombs," "rocket weapons with atomic or hydrogen warheads," and "atomic artillery."

(3) The Soviet offer to prohibit manufacture of nuclear weapons in satellite countries probably has little practical meaning even though its enforcement might be simpler than a ban on stockpiling. US intelligence estimates have concluded that it is extremely unlikely that Moscow would in any case permit independent nuclear weapons production in the satellites. And any Soviet-controlled program for such production

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in Eastern Europe would probably have only marginal value for the Soviet weapons program and would be undertaken primarily for psychological reasons. This offer would thus entail little if any sacrifice for the Soviet Union, whereas from the West German standpoint it could involve substantial sacrifice.

(4) The Soviet proposal would, if accepted, appear to entail greater military sacrifices for the West than for the USSR. It would deprive the core of the NATO forces in Europe of modern weapons, including certain defensive categories, and hence would sharply weaken the deterrent capability of this part of the NATO front. The Soviet Bloc military threat to Germany stemming from numerically greater conventional forces, and from the close proximity of Germany to the Soviet Union would remain unimpaired and perhaps would even be greater. Added to this threat would be the uncertainty as to whether the agreement was being fully lived up to in the Bloc territory. Moreover, Western agreement to the singling out of nuclear weapons for special treatment would contribute to the long-standing Soviet goal of putting a curse on these weapons in order to inhibit their use by the West in the event of war.

(5) The Soviet plan would place West Germany in a permanently inferior military position as compared to other NATO members. It would in the Soviet view undoubtedly be a step toward further measures of demilitarization on the basis of a divided Germany and hence serve to separate Bonn from the rest of NATO.

C. Probable Soviet Goals

Although, as noted, Moscow undoubtedly views a nuclear weapons build-up in Western Europe with serious misgivings, there appear to be definite limits beyond which it would not go to prevent such a build-up.

Short of the use of force, which can almost certainly be ruled out, Moscow might step up pressure on the Western position in Berlin, using the GDR as its stallion horse. Less belligerently, it might publicly announce the development of nuclear weapons in the Warsaw Pact area either solely under the control of Soviet forces stationed there or under some ostensible scheme for joint Soviet-satellite control. In general, it would be the Soviet purpose to drive home the contention that Western moves had produced a heightening of tension and of the risks of war.

On the "constructive" end of the scale, the proposal for an "atom-free zone" probably points to the limits beyond which Moscow will not go. That is, there is at present no reason to believe that the USSR will either consent to the unification of Germany on the basis of free elections or agree to Western proposals for a cessation of fissionable materials production for weapons purposes. Either one of these concessions would of course radically change the international atmosphere and could

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undoubtedly be expected to produce a re-examination of Western plans. The atom-free zone proposal, and occasional suggestions by Soviet bloc leaders that the zone should be extended to other European countries, suggests that Moscow would be prepared to offer the exclusion of nuclear weapons from all the European satellites in return for a similar commitment from the West covering the "western half of the continent.

The current Soviet proposal, which involves three Eastern countries against only one Western country, indicates that Moscow might conceivably go so far as to offer a completely "atom-free Eastern Europe (not, of course, including the USSR) in exchange for exclusion of nuclear weapons from only some of the continental NATO countries. It seems more likely, however, that Moscow, at least initially, would call for an equal commitment.

In view of the shortcomings, noted above, of such schemes it seems unlikely that the USSR seriously expects to get its proposal accepted. On the other hand, it probably does have hopes that, in combination with warnings of the dire consequences which would result from the Western plans and with certain actual steps for a counter build-up in Eastern Europe, the proposal might have a delaying effect, promote domestic political tensions over the nuclear weapons issue in the West, build up pressures for new talks between East and West, and arouse neutral sentiment, especially in Asia, against NATO.

If this assessment of probable Soviet expectations is correct, it suggests that Soviet concern over the "Western plans, while undoubtedly serious, is limited. That is, Moscow probably has concluded that in the end it can live with the new situation from a military standpoint and will find much that can be exploited in it from a political standpoint. There have been indications in some of Khrushchev's recent interviews, notably in that with Eleanor Roosevelt wherein he soft-pedalled Soviet concern over the fourth-country problem (see IB 2194), that this is in fact the Soviet estimate.

II. HISTORY OF THE PROPOSAL

A. Early Soviet Suggestions

The first formal Soviet reference to prohibition of nuclear weapons and atomic military units in a "European zone appeared in the Soviet proposal submitted to the UN Disarmament Sub-committee on March 27, 1956. This proposal had been foreshadowed by Communist statements and propaganda on equipping of US forces in the German Federal Republic with atomic weapons.

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At the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Geneva (October 1955), Foreign Minister Molotov had suggested the creation of a "zone of limitation and inspection of armaments in Europe" to include the territory of West Germany, East Germany, and "the states bordering on them, or at least certain ones of them." While there was no explicit mention at that time of banning atomic weapons within such a zone, the heavy Soviet propaganda campaign against the stationing of US atomic weapons in West Germany suggested that the USSR had this in mind.

Echoing this propaganda campaign, the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact proposed on January 28, 1956 a big-power agreement to exclude nuclear weapons from the equipment of any armies stationed in Germany, including West and East German as well as other troops. This proposal was limited to German territory but was worded in such a way as to cover the possible transfer of such weapons from other states to German forces.

At the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev made a brief reference to "partial steps" the USSR was willing to take "prior to agreement on the most important aspects of disarmament." One of these was "that the troops stationed in Germany should have no atomic weapons"

The January 28 proposal by the Warsaw Pact members was incorporated into the comprehensive Soviet disarmament plan presented to the UN Disarmament Subcommittee on March 27, 1956. Among other things this plan proposed limitation and inspection of armaments in Germany and unnamed "adjacent states." It proposed specifically that "the stationing of atomic and hydrogen weapons of any kind in the zone [of limitation] shall be prohibited" and that "joint inspection by the parties to the agreement shall be instituted." While no details were given, this plan presumably was meant to include the armed forces of the two German states as well. One of the measures included in this Soviet plan -- which, Moscow explained, constituted a proposal for partial, interim measures pending agreement on the comprehensive plan -- again involved the banning of nuclear weapons in both parts of Germany.

A restatement of the Soviet disarmament position, accompanying the Bulganin letter of November 17, 1956 to President Eisenhower, included general references to banning of atomic and hydrogen weapons but did not make any specific mention of a ban on stationing nuclear weapons in Germany.

The January 7, 1957 Soviet-East German communique following government talks in Moscow urged the "banning of mass destruction weapons" in Germany but did not go beyond the statement that "the disarmament problem can be partially resolved by the establishment of a restricted armaments zone in Europe comprising both parts of Germany." In his report to the SED plenum on February 3, Party leader Ulbricht said "the equipping of the West German NATO army with modern weapons, including atomic weapons, [was] a dangerous focus of provocati- ons" Ulbricht alluded to the Soviet-East German communique of January 7 but did not make any specific reference to the suggestion contained in it for the establishment of a restricted armaments zone.

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The imminent extension of nuclear weapon capacity to NATO and non-NATO countries by means of special US "atomic units," mentioned in President Eisenhower's January 1957 budget message, prompted a blunt TASS statement on January 23 warning those countries against accepting such weapons on their soil. This statement set the tone for the next round of threatening notes to NATO countries, especially to West Germany, during the spring of 1957. It did not, however, repeat the proposals to exclude nuclear weapons from either Germany or a wider zone.

The Soviet disarmament proposal submitted to the UN Disarmament Subcommittee on March 18, 1957 reiterated the Soviet plan of March 1956 in substantially unaltered form, including the proposal to establish a "zone of limitation" in Europe encompassing the territory of "both parts of Germany and that of states adjoining them." Within such a zone "the stationing of atomic military formations or any form of atomic and hydrogen weapons" would be prohibited and joint inspection "of the armed forces and armaments of the states parties to the agreement" would be instituted. This plan for the first time also included a general provision prohibiting the stationing of nuclear weapons on foreign soil.

None of these various statements and proposals gave details on the implementation of a nuclear weapons ban in a zone of limitation and none was explicit on the question of production of nuclear weapons in the proposed zone.

B. Production of Nuclear Weapons

The first explicit suggestion for the outlawing of the production of nuclear weapons in an atom-free zone -- i.e., in this instance both parts of Germany -- came in a speech by East German Premier Ulbricht on April 3, 1957 before the People's Chamber. Apparently prompted by reports that Bonn might be moving toward independent production, he proposed:

- (a) cessation of all propaganda and all preparations for atomic war on German territory;
- (b) joint agreement of both governments on the outlawing of atomic bombs and on reciprocal renunciation of the production of atomic weapons;
- (c) joint agreement, or separate pledges, to strive for a ban upon the stationing of atomic guns and other atomic weapons on German soil.

The proposal to outlaw the production of atomic weapons on German soil was subsequently formally endorsed by the USSR in notes to West Germany on April 27 and September 7.

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A Soviet memorandum on "partial disarmament measures" submitted to the UN Subcommittee on April 30, 1957 made no mention of the atom-free zone proposal, although it referred to the desirability of troop cuts in Germany and in the NATO and Warsaw Pact areas. Likewise, a Soviet aide-memoire of June 7 to the US disarmament delegation in London was silent on the question of prohibiting the stationing or production of atomic weapons in Germany except to call such stationing a "serious threat to peace and security of the peoples..."

East Germany emphasis on banning nuclear weapons production continued throughout 1957. The point was made, for example, in a statement by the GDR Council of Ministers on July 26 and an August 8 speech of Premier Grotewohl. Both repeated the proposal for "agreement on a ban on the storing and manufacture of atomic weapons on German soil...;" neither mentioned inclusion of "adjacent states" in an atom-free zone or controls to enforce such a ban.

C. Transfer of Nuclear Weapons

A Soviet memorandum submitted at the 12th General Assembly on September 20, 1957 included a provision "not to place these weapons [atomic and hydrogen] at the disposal of any other states or commands of military blocs." A clause explicitly banning transfer of nuclear weapons to other countries (rather than merely their stationing on foreign soil) had been foreshadowed in Bulganin's letter to British Prime Minister Macmillan on July 22 wherein he wrote of the need for "measures for the prevention of atomic war in Europe," including agreement not to "distribute" nuclear weapons on European territory. Also, on August 5 Bulganin told a visiting Japanese delegation that the USSR is "most strongly opposed" to the transfer of atomic and hydrogen weapons to foreign countries.

D. Geographic Dimensions of Atom-Free Zone

Until October, the proposals for establishing an atom-free zone made specific mention only of west and east Germany and referred only vaguely to the inclusion of "adjacent," or neighboring, states. The scope of such a zone was more closely defined on October 2 when Polish Foreign Minister Gajacki declared in a speech to the UN General Assembly that Poland would bar nuclear weapons from its territory if the two parts of Germany would consent to such a prohibition on their territories. He said:

"In the interest of Poland's security and of European détente, and after consultation on this initiative with other members of the Warsaw Pact, the Government of the Polish People's Republic declares that, should the two German states express their consent to putting into effect the prohibition of production and stockpiling of atomic and thermonuclear weapons on their territories, the Polish People's Republic is prepared simultaneously to take the same action on her own territory."

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The Polish claim to initiative in making this proposal is somewhat dubious in the light of previous Soviet and East German proposals and propaganda efforts concerning an atom-free zone embracing both German states and vaguely mentioning adjacent states. In fact, the quick Soviet endorsement of the Polish declaration and the prompt offer by the Czech UN delegate to include Czechoslovak territory in the proposed zone indicate detailed bloc planning.

Malapacki himself stressed that his proposal had prior approval of the Warsaw Pact countries. It is not, of course, impossible that the Poles suggested the new emphasis on the idea and that Moscow was willing to let them take the public lead. It might have felt that the proposal would gain in impact because of Polish authorship; moreover, at no real cost to itself, it permitted the Poles to show a certain independence of action. There can be no doubt, however, that Moscow was in full accord with the Polish initiative from the outset and that the proposal constituted a logical extension of what the USSR itself had been suggesting, although with less emphasis, since early 1956.

The Polish proposal was reaffirmed on December 13 in a speech by Malapacki urging agreement in principle on an atom-free zone, followed by the establishment of definite controls, about which he gave no details. Malapacki also endorsed an East German statement of December 11 which proposed the conclusion of an agreement between the two German states to ban production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons on their territory. He called such a step the most direct means of creating a central European zone free of nuclear weapons. In private talks with Western diplomats, Malapacki underlined Polish seriousness in advancing the scheme.

The offer of Poland and Czechoslovakia to join an atom-free zone with both German states promptly became a common feature of Communist propaganda advocating initial steps to improve the international situation. In anticipation of the December NATO Paris conference, Moscow launched an intensive propaganda campaign in which the atom-free zone occupied a key role. On December 11, the East German proposal of August 8 was repeated and West Germany was urged to come to an agreement on it. The support pledged by Poland and Czechoslovakia in the event of an agreement was cited. The main points of this December 11 statement were that West Germany should agree:

- (1) not to allow the stationing or storing of nuclear weapons and rocket weapons connected with them on its territory;
- (2) not to produce any atom bomb or rockets or to acquire them from other states through purchase or by other means;

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- (3) not to equip its armed forces with nuclear weapons and missiles, irrespective of their origin;
- (4) to achieve the removal of such mass destruction weapons as are already in West Germany by negotiations between the Federal Republic and the powers which stationed them there.

This was the first time rockets and missiles were mentioned in any Communist statement as being among the types of weapons which should be banned from a geographic zone. Again no mention was made of any method of enforcing such a prohibition.

Bulganin's letter of December 10 to President Eisenhower, as well as those to the heads of other NATO governments and the Soviet notes to all UN members, contained a proposal which in effect formalized the "Rapacki plan" and in addition sought to put special pressure on the US and UK to begin the process of instituting an atom-free zone. Moscow used the following terms:

"The USSR and Great Britain, in conjunction with the United States, should agree to renounce the deployment of nuclear weapons of all kinds on the territory of West and East Germany. If this agreement is supplemented by an understanding between the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic concerning the renunciation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons and the deployment of such weapons in Germany, then Poland and Czechoslovakia, too, would not manufacture or deploy such weapons on their territories, as has already been officially declared by the Polish and Czechoslovak Governments." (From Bulganin's letter to Macmillan.)

The proposal was repeated by Khrushchev and Gromyko in their speeches to the Supreme Soviet on December 21 and "endorsed" in a Supreme Soviet resolution on the same day. This resolution was subsequently sent to all foreign missions in Moscow for transmittal to their governments and parliaments.

B. Threat of Nuclear Armament of Satellites

The obverse side of the Soviet scheme to exclude nuclear weapons from central Europe has been an increasingly explicit threat to equip the satellite armies with such weapons. An explicit Soviet threat to provide the East European satellites with nuclear weapons if the US gave them to West Germany was first made in a note to West Germany on April 27 warning that its European neighbors "would naturally be forced to reply by taking appropriate measures to strengthen their defense" in the event of atomic arming of West Germany. This threat had been

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foreshadowed in a statement by Marshal Zhukov to West German newsmen on April 19 to the effect that the USSR "commands all the necessary means" to take countermeasures if West Germany should receive nuclear weapons.

At the same time, the press office of the East German Premier denied on April 29 that any Soviet missile launching sites were located in East Germany or that nuclear weapons were stored there. On May 5, the same office announced that "no atomic weapons are being stored or produced on the territory of the GDR and that nothing of this will be changed in the future," an announcement which would appear to include Soviet forces stationed in East Germany. (Similar statements were issued by Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria in April and October, respectively.)

On the other hand, a Red Star article of May 7 repeated the suggestion that Warsaw Pact countries might be equipped with nuclear weapons. The atomic armament of West Germany was called "a step which cannot fail to cause corresponding measures to be taken to insure the security of those countries against which West Germany is being armed..."

A Soviet note of June 27 threatened instantaneous destruction of West Germany in the event of war and again mentioned that "it is also necessary to reckon with the fact that the turning of Western Germany into a NATO atomic place d'armes and the equipping of the Lundeswehr with nuclear weapons will confront the Soviet Union and its friends with the need of taking in reply measures to insure their common security."

This threat was again made to Bonn in a Soviet note of September 7 on the subject of German reunification. Likewise "measures of retaliation" were referred to in the Soviet disarmament memorandum of September 20 to the UN. In his interview with W. H. Hearst (November 22) Khrushchev made the most specific reference to date when he said, "whether the armies of the countries signatory to the Warsaw treaty will be supplied with modern arms, including rockets with atomic and nuclear warheads, will depend on the situation, and on the line to be followed by the countries belonging to the North Atlantic bloc." At the same time, he asserted that Soviet military units stationed in East Germany now have "all types of weapons necessary ... to repulse aggression," implying that Soviet forces at least were equipped with nuclear weapons. Also in November a Soviet broadcast to Norway asserted that if NATO nations receive atomic weapons, "it is most probable that the Warsaw Pact countries will adopt a similar measure."

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The Bulganin letter of December 10 to President Eisenhower contained an indirect reference to this threat in the statement that "the plans to equip America's allies in Europe with nuclear arms... can only aggravate the already complex situation on the continent by starting an atomic arms race between European countries." Similarly, Polish Foreign Minister Gajacki on December 13 made the allusion that "one cannot think that the countries which will feel endangered by these steps will fail to draw from them the conclusion that they should strengthen their security." Polish and Czech propaganda had earlier noted the availability of Soviet nuclear weapons on request.

In general, except for Khrushchev's statement regarding the equipping of Soviet forces in East Germany, Moscow thus has sought to maintain the impression that no nuclear or offensive missile weapons have so far been assigned to Warsaw Pact forces outside the USSR but that this situation might change if the West proceeds with its plans.

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